

AREA FORUM (BIDSTON AND CLAUGHTON)

Tuesday, 5 February 2013

Present:

Councillor	D Roberts (Chair)
Councillors	G Davies S Foulkes AR McLachlan H Smith
Community Representatives	Jean McIntosh Pat Landsborough Jim Parsons
Lead Officer	Ian Brand - Head of Asset Management
Council Officers	Julie Mann (Library Service) Steve Preston (Community Safety)
Area Service Co-ordinator	Tracey Smith
Merseyside Fire and Rescue	Paul Murphy

Apologies

Councillors	J Crabtree
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1 **WELCOME**

Councillor Denise Roberts, welcomed forum members and 8 members of the public to St James Centre, Laird Street, Birkenhead.

Ian Brand read the following Neighbourhood Working Statement:-

A report proposing a new approach for Neighbourhood Working was recommended by Cabinet in January, and will now be voted on by all Councillors in the coming weeks.

The new Neighbourhood Working Approach will create four neighbourhood teams in Wirral and devolve decision making and budgets directly to local communities.

It aims to tackle issues at source and target resources based on the needs of individual areas. Budgets and decision making would be devolved to local areas, to be designated according to need.

Multi-agency teams, made up of public services including the local authority, police, and health, would be based in communities.

The move will result in the abolition of the existing 11 Area Forums.

Instead, local committees, chaired by Councillors and working with residents, would have a key role in drawing down and allocating resources, based on a neighbourhood plan which would have strong input from local people.

The benefits of joining up services and sharing knowledge are already well documented, reducing costs, promoting good practice, and enabling early intervention to reduce the demands on public services. Not only can they result in better, more effective services, but they are the way forward in terms of working more closely and effectively with Members, partners, and local people.

Wirral's budget deficit is well documented, and initial reports that this new way of working can not only reduce costs, but also result in better outcomes for local people, can only be welcomed.

Wirral still has a way to go in finalising plans for neighbourhood teams, but it is proposed that a neighbourhood team will be established in each of Wirral's four Parliamentary constituency areas, with staff and services being located within them.

Each team will report to its own Public Service Board, which includes public services such as the Council, Police, Health and Education. This team will co-ordinate the delivery of a Neighbourhood Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plans will be produced by each area's Constituency Committee, to be chaired by a Councillor and including councillors, community representatives, voluntary and community sector representatives, and - by invitation - the local MP. This plan will outline each area's needs and priorities.

An over-arching Wirral Together Public Service Board will have overall responsibility for the successful implementation of the scheme and for the Neighbourhood Plans.

Should the proposal be agreed, teams will begin working in communities from May 1.

Q: If there is a different lot of people when will the people have a chance to say what needs doing where?

A: Tracey Smith – it is split into 4 parliamentary constituencies and staff will be based in the community so they can be approached daily and the public won't need to wait for forums.

2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS FORUM

Tracey Smith – with regards to the Finance Department looking in to holding an event/drop in session their response is detailed below.

Action: Finance Department to look into holding an event/drop-in session for residents, community/voluntary groups to attend to be able to gain further

advice and support on these changes and to give residents as much information to help them understand the changes that may effect them.

Response from Finance

From an operational perspective since the early reforms started to be implemented, April 2010 we have consistently been administering the corresponding changes as part of the routine administration of the Housing Benefit /Council Tax Benefit schemes. This necessitated advising those affected, including stakeholders such as landlords, where it was appropriate to do so, of the imminent change and then writing to the individuals concerned as the change to their claim was actioned. On an ongoing basis this has continued and the same practice is being followed with the more significant reform changes:-

Extension of shared room rate to under 35 year olds – Those affected were written to, on three occasions during 2011/2012 , advising of the change, that it would affect them and how. Their landlords were also contacted and advised accordingly and encouraged to speak directly with any tenants affected about their increased liability for rent.

Social Sector size criteria – Have all been written to, Nov 2012, advised of the change and implications, asked to fill in a benefit review form, landlords also working directly with officers and will be advised of all tenants affected in near future

Benefit Cap – All those identified as being affected, likely to be affected, written to in Nov 2012. Further plans to write and potentially undertake home visits in certain cases and once the schedule for implementation on Wirral is known.

Council Tax Support Scheme – Public consultation and targeted consultation, all those of working age currently in receipt of Council Tax Benefit will be written to in February, circa 22K, advising of the change, what it broadly means and a revision of their Council Tax Benefit claim as it transfers to Council Tax Support Scheme will follow, notification of entitlement to follow etc. Every household in Wirral will be informed of the changes along with their Council Tax bill for 2013-14 and invited to apply if applicable.

Local Welfare Assistance-The council is responsible for Crisis Loans and Community Care grants previously administered by Department of Working Pensions. The Council is currently setting up the required processes to administer this new scheme.

Council Tax Discount and Exemption changes-These changes will affect in excess of 8,000 properties and will result in the owners being billed for an additional £3million. Owners affected by these changes will be written to at the end of February.

These changes are also publicised through the Council's web pages, which also includes the recently concluded Public Consultation around the Council Tax Support Scheme and to the landlord community through a variety of media, the dedicated focus group, Wirral 's Private Landlord Forum, the Social Sector Forum and through features in Wirral's Landlord Link-up magazine. Partners in the voluntary/ advice sector are also kept abreast of the changes and significantly Wirral's approach in

their administration and response to the impacts, again this is done through the long term established Voluntary Sector Forum.

Officers are currently working with colleagues in PR regarding the next step which supplements the directed contacts, i.e. wider publicity for the changes generally. This is planned to include the use of "mail chimp" which will send an email to all those registered on the council's emailing list, social networking sites such as Twitter & Facebook together with appropriately timed press releases and any other cover that press and PR colleagues advise is likely to secure interest/ reach the wider Wirral public.

In view of the vast raft of changes from 1 April 2013 and that the Government are continuing to change the various schemes so near the start date, such as postponing the benefit cap, it was felt that the client base was better served with individual contact, albeit sometimes on 2 or 3 separate occasions rather than hold event/drop in

Q: Welfare and benefits coming in now – it is very low key and not very publicised at all with regards to council tax.

A: Tracey Smith – as far as I am aware the 22% council tax is not until 2014.

Cllr Steve Foulkes – there was a notice of motion at the last full council to galvanize a plan. The area where the gap is the residents in private sector. Might be worth making people aware that pay day loan companies are using this to try and get people to get loans.

Cllr Ann McLachlan – people are knocking on doors in the local area and saying they are provident loans but it is a front for pay day loans.

3 **UPDATE ON BUDGET CONSULTATION**

Tracey Smith – 6,522 people responded. It was the biggest consultation ever. There were a lot of petitions. Report will go to cabinet on 7th February and full council on 18 February. Full report will be available on the internet and if you are not on the internet a hard copy can be provided. Tracey thanked everyone who was involved.

Cllr Steve Foulkes – money has been released since the last forum for £30k; have the successful bidders been told?

Tracey Smith – there was one last meeting on 1st February and once the report has been done the successful people will be told.

4 **PARTNER ORGANISATIONS UPDATE**

Julie Mann gave an update on Libraries.

Libraries have been asked by the Council to work with Neighbourhood Forums so we can expand and enhance our role in the communities we serve.

The Council has also asked that we make the Forums aware of the contribution volunteers are making in libraries both in Wirral and in other parts of the country –

The Wirral picture - At present we have approximately 21 volunteers working as IT Support within Wirral Libraries. Our first aim was to replace the IT assistance formerly provided by PENTRA but we hope to extend this to all sites that require it in the future. As there are changes in the benefits system ahead which will require more and more people to apply online, it is likely more of Wirral's population may require access to our computer suites and help in using the technology. We have volunteers currently working in Bebington, Birkenhead, Wallasey, Prenton, Bromborough, Rock Ferry, St James, Moreton, Seacombe, Heswall & Wallasey Village libraries and our recruitment process is ongoing. We carry out informal interviews, CRB and/or identity checks, obtain references and require all our volunteers to abide by the council's policies on Customer Care, Data Protection & use of the Internet & Email. Our partners, The Reader Organisation, are recruiting volunteers who we hope will be able to go out to some of our "Home Reader" clients and read with them in their own homes – thus helping to alleviate loneliness & social isolation. We are investigating the possibility of setting up a second-hand bookshop in one of our libraries, organised and staffed by volunteers.

The wider picture – volunteers are being used widely in libraries throughout the country. In some cases libraries are run entirely by volunteers as an alternative to a library closing completely. In some of these libraries, support is still provided by the council & by qualified library staff. Volunteers are also working alongside paid staff to support them and enable opening hours to be extended or at least not reduced. Finally volunteers are used as extra help to enhance library services – acting as "meeters & greeters", facilitating reading groups, assisting with the Summer Reading Challenge for children and with story time sessions, running second-hand bookshops, helping in home reader services and as local studies assistants.

The Council also believes that the Forums need to be aware of the particular needs of various groups such as children, older people, people with special needs, and asked to investigate the ways in which their needs can be better catered for in the library –

We already work with partner organisations such as Reach out, Connexions, CAB and the Wirral Society for the Blind and Partially-sighted and The Reader Organisation. Some of our libraries are used as bases for Literacy Buddies to work. A wide variety of courses are held in our sites.

We are careful to look at Equality Impact Assessments and are part of the Departmental Equality Group. We are actively involved in various projects that promote improved health & well being.

We provide an e-book download service that is available 24/7. E-books have the potential to address the issue of social inclusion & enable partially-sighted people to access materials otherwise beyond their reach in terms of cost & accessibility. They can provide other benefits for these customers as today's e-reader devices have excellent features to improve accessibility (they are light and easy to hold, fonts can

be increased, some have text narration, contrast can be increased or decreased etc) and these customers no longer have to wait for large print editions to read the latest best-seller.

We have prioritised vulnerable groups such as our Home Reader clients and children to ensure that the current spending freeze will impact them as little as possible in terms of the service they receive from the libraries. We are keen that libraries continue to be seen as safe, welcoming, neutral spaces for all members of the community.

Libraries must ensure that all groups in the community have a chance to give their views - We utilise regular consultations and surveys to find out the needs and views of both users and non-users. A number of our libraries have “Friends” and “User” groups who are very pro-active in giving us feedback on our services & suggestions for improvements. The public can contact us in a variety of ways if they have problems or complaints – via written forms available from all sites or using the “Rate this Page” facility on the website. The library service plans to take an active part in the upcoming four-year Heritage project “Wirral Remembers” which intends to really engage with as many community groups as possible which could result in our services and resources becoming more widely known and better utilised throughout the community.

What’s happening at YOUR local library?

Beechwood Library:

Read Yourself Well - Providing a range of information (including books, leaflets and CDs), on medical conditions and treatments, including, mental health, alternative therapies, healthy living. Information on local support groups and services is also available.

Toy Library - provides a full range of toys and equipment for use by children and carers. The toy library is run and managed as a partnership between Wirral libraries, Sure Start and Early Years Partnership. There is an annual subscription to join the toy library, which is:

£5 for early years providers (which allows a maximum of 2 loans for parents and 6 for early years providers) £2 for parents (which allows a maximum of two loans) . There is also a charge of 75p for each item loaned and toys can reserved for 80p per item. Some of the more expensive items require a £5.00 deposit.

Computers 7

Reading Group - contact the library for details.

Get into Reading - Adult Reading Group - Book at Beechwood, Fridays, 11am-12pm

Beechwood Bookworms - A children's reading group every Friday 4pm - 4.45pm

Reachout Work Club - Tuesdays 9:30am to 11:00am

Free confidential advice and guidance.

Information Point - which can provide information about a wide range of Council services.

St James Library

10 computers are available for public use /access to the internet. Some IT support from volunteers.

Sure Start and the Northend Neighbourhood College are also based in St James Centre and a cafe facility is available.

Read Yourself Well - materials include books, leaflets and CDs. They provide information on medical conditions, treatments, mental health, alternative therapies, relaxation, healthy living and lots more. Information about local support groups and services is also available.

[Get into Reading](#) - **Adult Reading Group** -Thursdays 10am -11.30am

Baby Bounce & Rhyme Session - For babies 0-18 months. Mondays at 11am

Story time for the Under 5's - for stories, rhymes, colouring and fun. -Tuesdays at 10am.

Reachout Work Club - Tuesdays 11:30am to 1:00pm FREE confidential advice and guidance.

Information Point - which can provide information about a wide range of Council services.

Ridgeway Library

10 computers for public use. There are also two suites upstairs for computer courses run by Birkenhead Sixth Form College.

Get into Reading - Adult Reading Groups - There are two adult reader groups, which each meet once a week: Monday afternoons 2.30pm - 3.30pm and Tuesday mornings 9.30 – 11.00am.

Children's Story time - Wednesdays at 10.30am, term time only.

Children's Activities - Craft and entertainment sessions during the summer holidays. Also join our reading scheme to gain prizes through the summer.

Information Point - which can provide information about a wide range of Council services.

Cllr Steve Foulkes – there are 24 libraries on the Wirral which is more than other Councils comparative. The message we want to get across is that we are up for anything that the community want the Library to be involved in. It is important that this core service can justify itself and provide a wider range of services. There is not a huge budget so need to get maximum benefit.

Cllr Ann McLachlan – there was no proposal in the budget to close any Library and they are becoming hubs partnering with one stop shops.

Community Safety - Steve Preston: Ian Lowrie and Jim Thompson send their apologies as they are both ill. Explained they have been busy over Christmas in Bidston/St James Claughton there has been trouble with anti social behavior. Getting less calls as youths are meeting with partner agencies and CCTV with sound is working. Crime in the area is rising as it is up by 22% in domestic burglaries but it is low as a Borough. Urged forum members to shut PVCU doors and do not just pull the handle up. Theft on motor vehicles has gone up slightly in December. Reminded forum members not to leave items on view in care. Also, in the news recently was a burglary in Brassey Street recently. Explained that regulations and statistics have to go through a team so would not have passed if it was not safe. Domestic violence calls have reduced. Dog fouling team and litter enforcement are now fining people. Targeted people who throw McDonalds wrappers out of the window as this was feedback from forums.

Q: What time do the dog fouling team come out?

A: Steve Preston Effectively they are 24 hours as when they are off duty community patrol will take over.

Merseyside Fire & Rescue – Paul Murphy with budget meeting on 26th February plans will be communicated. Bonfires are down by 37% for last October. The Fire Service is fully supportive of the Council moving to the constituency areas. Birkenhead Fire Station is on target for August 2013 and there will be opportunities for people to use the community area. Accidental dwellings last year were 14, this

year 10. Home fire safety checks continue to be delivered. Deliberate secondary fires were 68 last year and 22 this year. Road traffic collisions were 6 last year and 3 this year. Terrific work with my staff and partner organisations. For home fire safety checks can call 0800 731 5958.

Jim Parsons – landlords of empty dwellings could contact you and then these could be fitted whilst property is empty/vacant.

Cllr George Davies – anything to do with preventing fires is fantastic but Carbon monoxide is what I worry about. I would like see joint with Council and Fire while you do the fire checks if we could get the funding then you would be an ideal partner.

Paul Murphy – whatever we can do with carbon monoxide prevention we will do.

Cllr Steve Foulkes – thanked the joint effort at the Noctorum Estate. They had the highest number of calls at bonfire night last year but thanks to Ridgeway who opened the school and put a bonfire on and thanks to everyone involved calls are now lower.

Cllr Pat Lansborough – explained he was the Secretary of Claughton Community Group and Birkenhead Park Rugby Club. Cllr Lansborough then read out the following report:-

We at the park have been successful in obtaining £25k from my employer, Royal London Mutual Insurance Societies Community Fund to fund a project both promoting and developing participation in healthy sporting activities by young people, irrespective of gender and ability.

Main criteria was health promotion and giving the well established link between poor socio-economic conditions and poor health and shorter than average life expectancy, often linked to unhealthy diet and lack of exercise, I was to demonstrate the significant impact such an award would have on the health of the youth of our area.

The benefits of the funding of course go far beyond generating healthy lifestyles in that we are looking at heightening self esteem of participants, creating community and whole life skills, such as discipline, team work and respect and hopefully thus equipping participants to make challenges on job and career markets later in life.

My reason for bringing this to your attention is not simply to share good news but to ask for support from groups in advertising and promoting our project in their own areas. We will be shortly advertising the project via the local press and radio media and also through engagement with youths in schools, colleges and community groups. The hope is that we can share the existing best practice and experiences of other local groups and by this collaborative approach, maximize the impact of our project on the provision of much needed activities for them in our area.

Cllr Denise Roberts – congratulations.

Jean McIntosh (community representative) I went to Arrowe Park Hospital as a 'mystery shopper' to see where the food is prepared and where it is stored. The place was immaculate and the food was amazing. The bedding is sent to Blackpool at the moment and each ward has an allocated budget for linen and pillows but sometimes the bedding is taken when for example the patient is transferred in an

ambulance to a different hospital or to a Nursing Home. People just have to remember that the hospital has a budget for everything. Even the curtains are provided by the League of Friends as there is no budget for this. I can do a report if you would like.

Cllr Denise Roberts – that sounds interesting. A report would be good.

Jean – It has really opened my eyes.

5 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Public member – re: park and ride at the North end of Birkenhead – this project has finished but there are no cars parking in there.

Cllr Harry Smith – I jump started Merseytravel to do that one as they wanted to do Bidston first but they never had the problems that the North End did. I had meeting last week and what I have managed to kick start is yellow lines and disabled bays outside the station which will hopefully be done Sunday, weather permitting. The bridge is not built yet and it will not be built until the next financial year. Things are in motion and Frank Field was big help.

Cllr Pat Lansborough – Ian mentioned that we may look at a demise in the area forums. The whole team has worked so hard and I hope they continue. Thank you to Tracey, Michelle, Louise, Andy and Helen.

Cllr George Davies – International Trade Centre is now starting to develop. Graham Burgess is very conscious that he is new to the Wirral and is visiting all wards to know what needs doing.

Cllr Denise Roberts closed the meeting and announced this will be the last forum in this format and thanked everyone involved and all who attended.